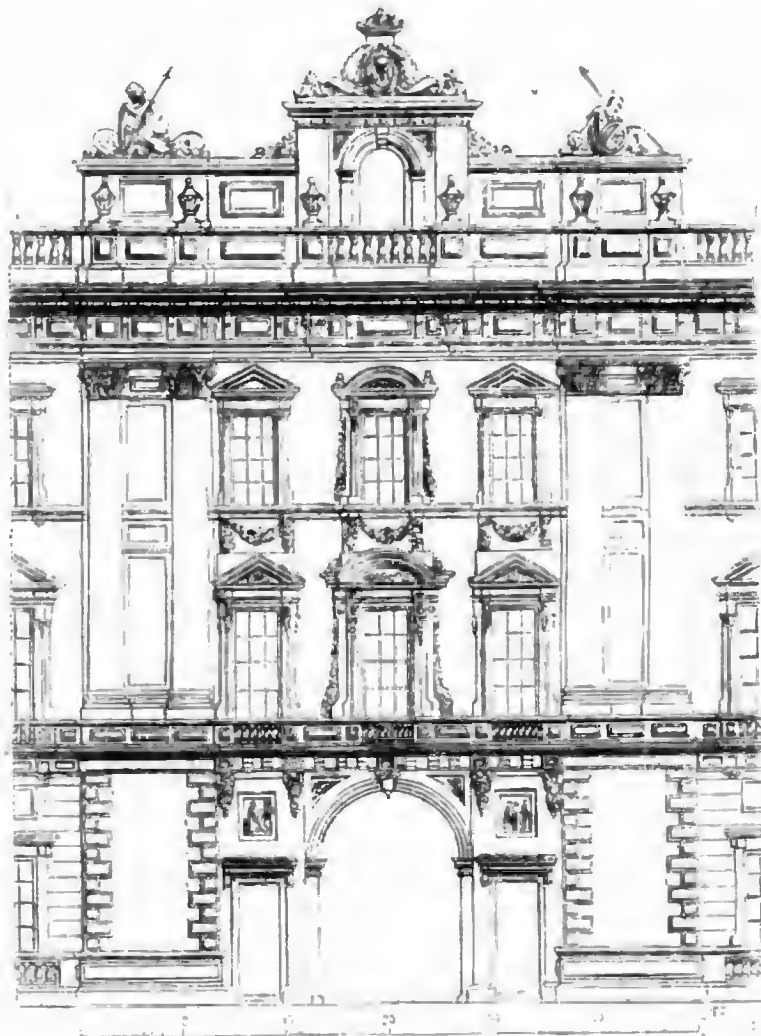


BUCKINGHAM PALACE.—CENTRE OF NEW FRONT.



THE RESTORATION OF THE "KAISER SAAL," AIX LA CHAPPELLE.

AMONGST the beautiful structures which adorn the banks of the Rhine, the Aachen town-hall (known by the above name) occupies a prominent place. At the beginning of the last century—a period of decay and degeneracy in many respects—it had been mutilated in a way, that neither its original plan, size, nor internal ornaments, could be any more recognised. The plan of this huge hall was similar to that of several mediæval buildings—as the royal residence at Paris, erected under Philip the Fair, and only destroyed a century ago; or the *Gurzenich* of Cologne:—viz., it was separated by a row of columns into two halves. Only the northern part had been completed, which, albeit of considerable size, still exhibited no trace of the splendour of the original design. The southern hall had been parcelled out into a number of subordinate spaces, and even divided by a flight of stairs, which passed from an under story right through it. As, however, amongst other laudable acts of King Frederic William III., the restoration of ancient buildings was thought of, the common council resolved on the ornamenting of the north hall. But it was a strange occurrence, that none seemed even to be aware of the real size of the structure they had before their eyes! A hasty plan was, therefore, concocted, and the stucco ornaments (triste trophies of the architectural genius of 1747)

knocked down, for substituting frescoes in their stead. This, however, led to a clever arrangement with the Art-Union of Düsseldorf—which, in the laudable expectation of finding here a worthy scope for their fresco painters, consented to contribute one-half of the profits of their exhibitions for three years to the above purpose. The cartoons of Mr. Rethel were accepted, and the plan of the restoration confirmed at Berlin.

The secrecy and exclusiveness with which the Aachen Common Council proceeded in this case, produced some disappointments and mistakes, because they really did not know what they were about. It was Professor Bock, of Brussels, who at last solved the enigma, and demonstrated the identity of the north and south hall as parts of one building.* His work affords interesting glimpses of the mechanism and theory of Byzantine and Carolingian palace structures. After the walls, which had been inserted (at a later period) between the vaults of the two halls, have been removed, Professor Bock's assertions became self-evident. After this, it was (wisely) resolved to pull down the intercepting walls, and to restore the original double hall, retaining, however, the hitherto frescoes. As the intermediate walls fell, a new one was to be constructed. But here again, some one thought, that the windows of the south hall were to be

blocked up, for obtaining a large surface and it was asserted that those southern windows were not of the original design, but an addition of an after period. On this a more controversy is still pending. Abstracting from even the old documents brought forth by Mr. Oebeke, there can be no doubt that these windows belonged to the original plan, although in the hurry in which most mediæval monuments were completed, or rather not completed,† they may be somewhat less symmetrical than those to the north. It is quite impossible to think, how the architect of such a building, should enter so little into its whole system and organism, as to construct a double hall whose halves are quite similar, but whose north side only should have windows, and thus prevent even the one sight of the splendid minister. Another fault of the present restoration of the hall, encroaching on its very practical use, is, that the great entrance is to be placed in the middle of the hall in that place where the windows were formerly; while, the old master, with the tact appertaining to that so-called mystical period, had placed it at the lower end of one of the length sides, "thus to afford, on festival occasions, to the processions or official entries, an appropriate expanse for their procedure and location in the whole hall." Pioneering in this mode of spurious modernization

* The Town Hall of Aachen—plan for the preservation intact of the German Cruciform Hall.—Jas. Rethel, A.C. Aachen, 1844. 170.

† This observation, applicable to even the social culture of the middle ages, made first of these remarks.—Jas. Rethel, A.C. Aachen, 1844. 170.